Colonel H. Wilson

BOB GREENE

Banquet time in Assassinationland

Dallas

JEFF WEST says he thinks he knows why some of us find his newest project a little creepy. "It's a generational issue," he said. "You have to take into consideration that over half of the U.S. population was born after Nov. 22, 1963. For the generations that didn't grow up with computer technology, yes, this might seem a little odd."

West, 41, is executive director of the Sixth Floor Museum in Dallas. The museum, which has been open for 10 years, is inside the former Texas School Book Depository.

On the 6th floor of that building, we are told, Lee Harvey Oswald aimed a rifle out a window overlooking Dealey Plaza, and, when John F. Kennedy came riding by in a motorcade, murdered the president. The Sixth Floor Museum is a privately owned "educational museum examining the events and historical legacy of the assassination."

Whatever you think of the idea of the museum, it is a success — 460,000 visitors this year will pay to walk on the same floor Oswald walked.

But this summer, a new twist has been added.

Visitors to the museum have never been permitted to walk up to the window from which Oswald shot President Kennedy. It is glassed off; no one can look out that window to get the same view that Oswald had.

Now, though, a video camera has been mounted in the window. And visitors to the museum's Web site are able, 24 hours a day, to see constantly changing camera shots from the window. It's . . . .

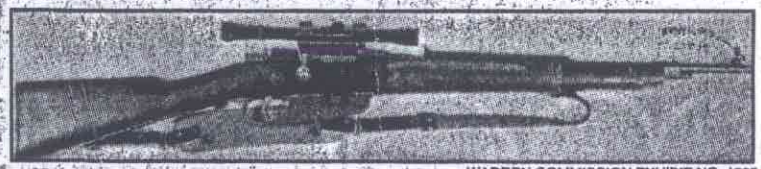
Well, it's a jarring sight. And it is more than a little creepy.

When the announcement was made that the video camera was going in, and that any person anywhere in the world would be able to share the assassin's sightline at any time of the day or night, the office of Sen. Edward Kennedy, President Kennedy's last surviving brother, issued this statement:

"Those who guided the original creation of the Sixth Floor Museum made a substantial effort to prevent the exploitation and commercialization of President Kennedy's death, and their efforts were a great credit to the people of Dallas. It is unfortunate that their accomplishment is now being undermined in this insensitive and tasteless manner."

West respectfully disagrees.

"It is what it is," he said. "This is part of our history. We couldn't have people walking up to the window, because we wanted to preserve the area around the window just as it was in 1963, and we didn't want people constantly



WARREN COMMISSION EXHIBIT NO. 1303

Oswald's gun: *Italian-made rifle found in the Book Depository*

Bob Greene is a columnist for the Chicago Tribune.

S.F. EXAMINER — 8/16/99

(y'all come)

walking up with their kids on their shoulders. But by glassing the area off, we didn't want to be giving the impression of 'You can't look out this window.' It's history. People should be able to have that view.

"Now you can have a live view from the window from your computer — something you can't see from the 6th floor of the museum itself if you're visiting here. We've already had 4 million hits on the Web page that has the camera shot."

The generational aspect, West said, is that young Americans who are growing up computer-literate accept as a given that they can and should have visual access to just about everything in the world through their computer screens.

And for them, the assassination of John Kennedy is in the same context as the assassination of Abraham Lincoln: It happened before they were born, and they don't have a personal emotional connection to it.

As it is, the museum does what it can to make a visit to the assassination building palatable — literally.

Convention groups are invited to reserve the old School Book Depository for dinner parties — "Plan your events with the caterer of your choice," the museum advertises, and says that formal seated dinners for up to 150 guests are available, or evening receptions for 350.

As for the live video shot from Lee Harvey Oswald's deadly perch, West said that preliminary discussions have been held about selling advertising rights on the Web site to an outside sponsor.

"At some point you'll probably see a sponsorship logo of some kind on our Web site next to the live video shot from the window," he said.

"We would only license sponsorship to an appropriate company, something in good taste."